

# Engaging Student Leaders as Outreach Ambassadors to Decrease Stigma and Increase Help-seeking Behavior on College Campuses

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# Agenda

- Literature Review on Peer Education
- What is a *CAPS Empowerment Ambassador*?
- Students Outreaching to Students
- Selection Criteria and Process
- Content of Training
- Challenges and Highlights
- Future Considerations

# Peer Health Education Literature

- 78% of US colleges and universities utilize programs with paraprofessionals or peer educators (Klein, Sondag, & Drolet, 1994).
- Peer Health Educators – benefits to self
  - After completing a full semester of peer education training, students improved in terms of leadership, peer education, relevant knowledge, and personal health behaviors” (Badura, Millard, Peluso, & Ortman, 2000).
  - Increased health knowledge, professional skills, self esteem, empowerment (White, Park, Israel, & Cordero, 2009).
- Peer Health Educators – benefits to campus community
  - Higher rates of HIV testing, condom use, and discussion of sexual health issues with their partners, compared to peers who did not attend a PHE led program (Richie & Getty, 1994)
  - Cost effective and resource savvy

## Peer Health Education Literature Con't.

- Peers are the single most potent source of influence on undergraduate student affective and cognitive growth and development during college (Astin, 1993; Kuh, 1993; Whitt, Edison, Pascarella, Nora, & Terenzini, 1999).
  - The frequency and quality of students' interactions with peers extends to a positive association with college student persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993).
- College-aged students often feel more comfortable talking to other students about sensitive issues.... College students rely on their peers as sources of information more than any other age group (Saywer, Pinciario, & Bedwell, 1997).

# The CAPS Empowerment Ambassador Program

- Mission

- To provide an opportunity for Montclair State University students to develop leadership, community outreach, and human services skills while also serving as change agents in promoting health, wellness, and mental health awareness in the Montclair State community.
- CAPS Empowerment Ambassadors receive training and mentorship in serving as outreach assistants for CAPS, with the aim of decreasing myths about seeking help, empowering and motivating other students to make healthy life changes, and providing information on counseling and CAPS services to raise awareness and decrease mental health stigma on campus.

# History of Ambassador Program

- Stemmed from the Iowa Outreach Conference (2010)
- Started with students who completed the Agents of Change Empowerment Program (all EOF, primarily students of color)
- Other students started to show interest, however *resource limitations* kept the program small and focused on minority/ EOF students
- Few CAPS staff participated in the training
- Fall 2012: Opened to recommendations from staff/faculty who nominated student leaders in addition to Agents of Change
- Fall 2013: Recruitment email to entire community; increased staff involvement in the selection, interview process, and training itself; addition of a Postdoc co-facilitator; both Fall and Spring training cohorts for the first time...GROWTH!

# The Role and Purpose of CAPS Empowerment Ambassadors

- Peer to peer messages
- Decreasing stigma of mental illness, help-seeking, and CAPS
- Clarifying myths on campus about CAPS
- Informing peers of CAPS services
- Serving as role models and student leaders on campus
- Collaborating with key departments and student organizations

## Students as Outreach Liaisons

- CAPS Empowerment Ambassadors serve as liaisons to key departments and underserved/under-represented groups on campus.
- Greek life, Active Minds, Veterans, student cultural organizations, Math & Science majors, EMTs & Police, First Year Students, Residence Life, Health Promotion, EOF (Educational Opportunity Fund), Psychology Club, LGBTQ Center, etc.



# Recruitment History

- Five Cohorts
- Cohorts of 6-10 students
- Fall (less diverse)
  - Recruitment email to entire community
  - Recommendations from staff/faculty
- Spring
  - Agents of Change graduates from the Fall
  - Recommendations from faculty/staff
  - Fall interviewees

# Selection Criteria

- Leadership experience at MSU or other university, with a letter of recommendation by a supervisor/mentor, is required.
- Community service experience; positive energy; motivation; drive to succeed; commitment to being a change agent in the MSU community; strong time management skills; ability to engage other students; overall leadership potential.
- The ability to serve as a bridge to underserved student groups and key departments on campus.
- Good academic and judicial standing, with a GPA of 2.75 +
- Availability on Fridays from 11:00am to 12:30pm for 8 weekly training seminars.

# Selection Process

- Application Questions:

- What are your strengths that make you a strong leader and role model for other MSU students?
- What educational or life experiences would make you a good CAPS Empowerment Ambassador?
- What, in particular, makes you interested in the CAPS Empowerment Ambassador position?
- What motivates you? Who inspires you? How would you motivate and inspire others?

- Interview Questions

- Perspective on Counseling
- How would you talk to a friend about CAPS?
- What are the issues facing MSU students in regards to CAPS?
- What are you hoping to get out of being a CAPS Ambassador?
- Ideas for potential outreach programs on campus

# Training Program Format and Content

- 8 weeks of training
  - One and a half hours
  - Didactic, experiential, process/discussion
- Introduction to CAPS staff members (as guest presenters, in addition to co-facilitators)
- Establish and grow key departmental relationships
- Shadow outreach events
- Develop an outreach project/event to occur within the next academic semester
- Pilot: One meeting a month with all Ambassadors for modeling and connection purposes

# Syllabus (1)

- Session 1: Orientation

- Introduction to the program, expectations, confidentiality and dual roles, introductions, goal setting, schedule.
- Activity/discussion: what is the meaning of counseling/therapy in your family/culture; introduction to counseling/therapy

- Session 2: Overview to CAPS Services

- Guest presenter: Dr. Jaclyn Friedman-Lombardo, CAPS Director: CAPS mission/philosophy; welcome.
- Nuts and bolts (location, hours, making an appointment, phone triage, intake, disposition process, confidentiality, cost/fee, referrals, staff; intro to tree/diagram of CAPS services; mental health stigma; dyad role plays.

# Syllabus (2)

- Session 3: Therapy/Counseling Services in Russ Hall
  - Guest presenters – Dr. Christopher Drost, CAPS Associate Director: Individual short term therapy; brief intro of different theoretical orientations; training program
  - Common presenting concerns; who uses CAPS & underserved populations; mental health stigma.
- Session 4: Group Therapy; Outreach and Community Intervention programs
  - Guest presenter – Dr. Lisa Weinberg, CAPS Psychologist: group therapy (interpersonal vs. support groups vs. outreach groups).
  - Mental health stigma; Outreach/drop-in groups; liaison relationships with other departments.

# Syllabus (3)

- Session 5: Referral Process/Services
  - Guest presenter – Lisa Westreich, LCSW, CAPS Case manager: Referral process/services
  - Dispelling myths; dyad role plays (practice answering questions and responding to concerns related to referral myths)
- Session 6: ECHO; Psychiatry Services; Emergencies
  - Guest presenters – Dr. Kristine DeJesus, Coordinator of AOD program; Dr. Bindi Shah, CAPS Psychiatrist – overview of ECHO and psychiatry services (psychiatrist vs. psychologist)
  - Discussion of AOD and medication issues

# Syllabus (4)

- Session 7: Signs of Distress; Helping a Friend; Self-Care
  - Meeting CAPS staff (whoever they have not yet met).
  - Recognizing signs of distress and reviewing how to refer/talk about CAPS programs/services; self-care; own personal feelings about seeking support/help; internalized stigma as student leaders; pressure; being role models on campus
- Session 8: Ambassadors in Action – Putting it all together
  - Processing outreach experiences; review/practice of outreach skills (mock table event); review of goals and next steps (outreach collaborations/projects); completing feedback form; party!



# Experiential Training Component

- Working with all staff at outreach events
- Shadowing outreach events- weekly emails with events they can attend
- Mentoring and supervision
- Connection with Active Minds
- Serving as a bridge/link/liaison to their respective departments, majors, residence halls, student organizations

# Highlights

Depression & Anxiety and Alcohol & Drug Screenings

Assisting with discussion groups on campus

Ambassadors joining/assisting with staff outreach events

Developed promotional materials and campaigns

Valentine's Day Residence Hall Event

De-Stress events during midterms and finals

Suicide Prevention Walk

Orientation table events

Greek & EMS Mental Health Training

*Let's Talk* Launch Events

World's Fair Community Event

Veteran Student Association Meetings

# Opportunities

- Counter the negative stigma of counseling
- Reach students who would not typically utilize CAPS' services
- Provide students with the opportunity to build their leadership experience
- Jazz up our depression and AOD screenings
- Free up staff time when advanced Ambassadors are ready to represent CAPS on their own
- Obtain a student perspective and voice (as a student advisory board) to inform services and marketing

# Challenges & Barriers

- Resource limitations in length and depth of training program
- Shift training toward implementing peer support not just outreach (e.g., bystander intervention)
- Resource limitations in following-up and mentoring students
- Dual Role of trainees/Ambassadors (e.g., past, current, or future CAPS client)
- Boundary Concerns (eg., therapist and client overlap in trainings and events) of staff
- In-active or non-responsive Ambassadors

# Engaging CAPS Staff and Community Stakeholders

- Buy-in from the community and CAPS staff is critical.
- CAPS staff is integrated into the interview and selection process.
- Trainees learning from and meeting all CAPS staff, including the Director, Associate Director, Group Therapy Coordinator, AOD Coordinator, Staff Psychiatrist, Referral Casemanager, and available Staff Psychologists representing diverse theoretical orientations, is critical to their training experience
- Trainees internalizing the voices of all staff, not just the Outreach Coordinator and facilitators, is imperative in order for them to obtain and relay a comprehensive understanding of CAPS services.

# Future Directions

- More connection with CAPS Ambassador alumni
  - Mentorship program
  - Make it a club/organization with bi-weekly meetings
  - Google Calendar shared with all alum and new
- Community Recognition
  - Maintaining status as an official student leadership program on campus
  - Having a satellite CAPS outreach/community office at a more central location on campus
  - Combining with Health Promotion Peer Advocates-mental health track

# Future Directions (cont.)

- Visibility
  - T-shirts, logo, club status
  - Connection with other clubs and organizations- Psychology Club, Multicultural Psychology Scholars, cultural groups.
- Application Process
  - Larger cohorts
  - Campus wide recruitment each semester
  - Enforce GPA requirements- who would we lose?
  - No seniors
  - Sample outreach event prepared in advance.

## Future Directions (cont.)

- Requirements of Enrollment
  - Semester minimum (3 events a semester)
  - Contracts to commit to an outreach project
- Bystander Intervention
  - Safe Zone Training
  - Basic Counseling Skills training
- Open House
  - More CAPS staff engagement- pot luck
- One day training
  - Saturday? Full day



# Questions and Discussion

- Thoughts, reactions, experiences...
- How could this apply to your university?
- How to further reach out to underserved groups?
- Do we train them to be interveners as well?
  - Active listening skills
  - Crisis management
  - Bystander Intervention

# Presenters: Contact Information

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